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ABSTRACT

The enthymeme--a syllogism in which one proposition is unexpressed--is adapted by the author to rhetorical analysis of movements and becomes the foundation for a theory of social change emphasizing social values and their historical transformation. Relating the enthymeme to the Burkean concepts of acceptance, rejection, casuistics stretching, and gang morality, the function of the enthymeme in stable periods and during periods of social upheaval is compared. A movement is viewed as a public drama--an extended rhetorical transaction occurs between competing systems of order and a mass, public audience. The essential nature of a social movement, from this perspective, is rhetorical. A movement involves the redefinition, creation, and reordering of key terms which are code words for whole complexes of value, attitude, belief, and devotion. The author suggests that the study of social change might most appropriately be the study of changing symbol systems through rhetorical analysis. (Author/LG)

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Transvaluation of Values

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My purpose in studying movements is not particularly to adapt rhetoric to movement study but rather to use movement analysis as a touchstone to better conceive rhetorical analysis in an authentic, and, I think, traditionally accurate, very broad perspective.

My goal, here, is to define the rhetoric of movement itself. I want to escape from rhetorical analysis of spokesmen/women as exponents of one view or another. This approach is inherently partial since we cannot achieve, even as a profession, completion on any significant movement using this piecemeal approach. We will never adequately understand the converging and competing pattern of persuasion which, we might say, "created" the New Deal. Are we doomed to superficiality or incompletion?

In hopes of avoiding both horns of this admitted dilemma, my attempt is to view the movement itself as a public drama or, using our traditional terminology, an extended rhetorical transaction between competing systems of order (manifested in spokesmen-women for the old order and for various movement ideas, ideologies, etc.) and a mass, public audience. In this schematic formulation, it should be understood, the speaker-audience roles are defined in principle. Participants in these roles might be assumed to change constantly. The movement is seen as a complex interplay of forces.

The essential nature of a social movement, from this perspective, is rhetorical. A movement is a linguistic-verbal-communication process the essential function of which is three fold:

1) The re-definition of key, controlling terms

2) The creation of new key terms,

and

3) The re-ordering of key terms.

Some such terms which are clearly open to continuing re-definition are "success," "beauty," "glory," "knowledge", "freedom." These words are vague almost to the point of emptiness. And yet they are admittedly important to the functioning of society. If members of a given society disagree strongly on the nature of "success" then no one can be successful in a social sense. Some key terms that seem to be in process of transition now are "community-individualism," "materialism-humanism;" "rationalism-emotionalism," and "freedom-order."

The importance of these key terms lies in their function. They are code words for whole complexes of value, attitude, belief, devotion, sentimental attachment and deep seated emotional commitment. They are organizing symbols for social systems. So. . .the study of social change might most appropriately be the study of changing symbol systems, or, the same thing, rhetorical analysis.

Kenneth Burke recommends this approach in two of his earliest works: Permanence and Change (1935) and Attitudes Toward History (1937). These are the two works which Hugh Dalziel Duncan identifies as the core of Burke's sociological (as opposed to literary) concerns.

The process of social change, a vital concern to a socially sensitive author writing in the thirties, is a dominant theme of these two books. Burke identifies the initial, pre-revolutionary stage as a period of acceptance (ATH) or Piety (PC). Such an era is characterized by a pervasive sense of unity founded on the certainty of shared beliefs and values. The Medieval world might be viewed as the prototype of "Acceptance." "God's in his Heaven and all's Right with the World." As Medieval Europe clearly demonstrates the existence of the most unpleasant, seemingly unfair, unequal and unjust practices may be quite consistent with perfect stability -- if

the system of acceptance or Piety is intact. The scheme of belief justifies whatever exists as the Catholic Church justified the Medieval social system by turning man's eyes to another world and a spiritual scheme of values. This era seems exceedingly strange to us because our scheme of values does not prepare us to understand it.

The Acceptance mode is necessarily the goal of every social system. It is an environment which permits men to live in relative peace with themselves and their neighbors (though they may well war abroad). It is a positive, productive, optimistic and, thus, desired condition.

In spite of these desired qualities, however, each scheme of acceptance inevitably breaks down. This occurs because the old pieties become incommensurate with impinging new realities. The new realities may derive from contact with other cultures, as when Western traders establish contact with primitive societies, or it may result from developing forces within the home state. Thus according to Max Weber and Jacob Burckhardt, the Medieval ethos foundered not on the shoals of religious dissent (i.e. Martin Luther's theses or the Calvinists) but earlier, in Italy, when confronted with the inexorable rise of the merchant class. Commerce required individualism, ambition, and an acquisitive spirit inimicable to the Medieval consensus. Thus the old values ultimately could not adapt without annihilating themselves, so they were abandoned. The Protestant Reformation was, then, the formulation of a socially productive value system. It was the spiritual confirmation and justification of a system of social relations established by the growing commercial society. (Of course it is unnecessary to mention that the spirit of Protestantism, in this sense is not limited to Protestants. It has no specifically religious connotations.)

The Old Order greets the breeches in Acceptance or shrinking of Piety with two common reactions. First, the Establishment attempts to deny that there is any breakdown. This may consist of merely ignoring the problem of active denials while attempting suppression at the same moment.

The second common response is identified by Burke as "casuistic stretching." This is the attempt to extend the principles of the Old Order far enough to envelop the competing new attitudes. Thus the Medieval Church might say it is not opposed to material well being so long as business methods are not sinful. Herbert Hoover, to move to a smaller scale movement, agreed to provide Federal relief funds so long as they were loans to local government and not grants. The Establishment is caught draving fine lines and abandoning its old massive authority.

The "Movements" or the first competing exponents of a New Order attempt to create and live by a new organizing principle or system of motivation. Burke refers to this process as an era of "Gang Morality." Each competing clique has its own view of social relations by which it justifies its own behavior. Each clique or "gang" has its own "Acceptance frame" on a small scale: Applying only to members of the dissident group. From the competition among these systems emerges the New Order.

One strategy characteristic of the Gang seeking to establish itself as a new orthodoxy is the use of "Persuasive Definitions" as described by Charles Stevenson. The new leader can create new modes of Acceptance by casting new meanings into old words. Thus, Franklin Roosevelt did not seriously challenge the "free enterprise system," but he did subtly re-define the terms so that a "free market" was really a market operating freely within specified limits.

The transition to the new order occurs when there is a final, total imbalance in the Old Order. It is hopelessly inadequate for the circumstances and a ready alternative seems to be available in one or more of the Revolutionary Gangs' or cliques' ideology.

Of course, the new system of values becomes the orthodox. It is the Acceptance Frame, the source of piety which inevitably will be challenged in turn. The process is cyclical and constant.

Viewed from this perspective, rhetorical analysis becomes the study of the substructure or set of presuppositions which support the value orientation of the old order and the many phases of the "new order" or movement groups. The critic is interested in the value orientation, assumptions or world view which characterize competing groups. Rhetoric becomes the study of subconscious forces which are adapted, applied, molded, shared and warred over. It is the study of what isn't there in black and white.

There already are two approaches to rhetoric which emphasize the importance of what the audience feeds into the speaker's message. One is the enthymeme. As Bitzer pointed out, "the missing materials of rhetorical arguments are the premises which the audience brings with it and supplies at the proper moment provided the orator is skillful." The premises might be expected to be the common value orientation of the particular culture or sub-culture from which the audience is drawn.

The other approach to the rhetoric of the "missing pieces" is through metaphor analysis. This approach is familiar from the works of I.A. Richards, Michael Osborn and Herman Stelzner.

Using these as well as other tools of symbolic analysis, I think we can trace the progress of a social unheaval in a way that 1) is appropriate for rhetoricians and 2) encompasses the fullness of the dynamic process of social change rather than zeroing in on one small feature.